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ABSTRACT

An intensive language program in elementary German at the University of Texas in Arlington is described in this article. The program, enabling undergraduates with no previous experience in German to complete the university's four-semester foreign language requirement in a single semester, is discussed in terms of classroom activities, language laboratory requirements, and homework. Students receive full academic credit for each semester's work as they complete the course requirements. Evaluation procedures are also commented on. (RL)

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AN INTENSIVE PROGRAM IN GERMAN

An intensive program in elementary German began at the University of Texas at Arlington in the spring semester 1971. The program enables undergraduates with no previous experience in German to complete the university's four semester foreign language requirement in a single semester. To achieve this goal, students take twenty contact hours per week of instruction--two hours per day five days per week in the classroom, and two hours per day in the language laboratory. The program has proved extraordinarily successful--successful in terms of the students' ability to read, write, speak and understand German, and in terms of the high percentage of students who continue their studies in German beyond the language requirement.

No special entrance requirements to the program are set; hence the students in it probably represent an academically non-exceptional group--a cross-section. They register, not for a single, sixteen-hour German course, but for the traditional four beginning courses--all in one semester. This for two reasons: 1) such a procedure permits the university registrar to accept the intensive program as part of the regular curriculum (in other words, we did not have to shepherd a cumbersome, sixteen-hour "new" course through the administrative hierarchy); 2) this procedure permits the student to receive separate credit for each segment of the program he successfully completes. If a student, for example, could not fulfill successfully the requirements of the fourth and final section of the intensive program, he could still receive credit for its first three parts, provided he had met their requirements. He would then elect in a subsequent semester German 4, the final level of the traditional four semester sequence.

Nine weeks (180 contact hours) of the one semester intensive program are allotted to the study of elementary German; that material customarily

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studied in two regular semesters. Six weeks (120 contact hours) are allotted to the study of intermediate German; that material covered in the third and fourth regular semesters. Throughout the program students meet from 8 to 10 a.m. and 11 to 1, with an hour to relax at 10 o'clock. During the first nine weeks they spend two classroom hours a day working with a beginning German text that stresses reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In the laboratory they work with tapes which supplement this text, so that the grammatical lesson of the previous hour is reenforced immediately. Each student has his own tape, and the instructor monitors him at all times, correcting pronunciation, answering questions on grammar and syntax, and generally prodding the student on. During the program's final six weeks, students spend two and one-half hours a day in the classroom reviewing grammar, reading and discussing modern short stories, writing short essays, and vying with each other on the sight-reading of selected German newspaper articles. Laboratory work, still supervised and monitored in this section of the program, strengthens the student's comprehension of spoken German and develops his oral facility through the use of films and programmed conversational drills.

Homework assignments throughout the semester require three to four hours daily and review all material covered in the classroom and laboratory on that day. A ten minute written or oral quiz is scheduled for every second day during the program, and a two-hour examination is given after the material of one traditional semester has been completed. In all, students take approximately thirty short quizzes and four major examinations. These let them know at all times the degree of their progress.

To measure the effectiveness of the intensive program, and to compare it to that of the traditional program, we administered two examinations to each of two groups of students: group one--those completing the intensive

course; group two--those completing the traditional sequence of four semesters, meeting only four hours per week and without supervised laboratory periods. With the first examination, a two-hour, comprehensive one of our own making, we measured listening and reading comprehension and knowledge of grammar. With the second examination, a 45 minute one provided by the Educational Testing Service of Princeton University, we measured reading comprehension and knowledge of grammar.

On the two-hour comprehensive test, students from the intensive program scored from a high of 98 percent to a low of 76 percent, achieving a mean of 90 percent accuracy. Students from the four-semester sequence scored from a high of 85 percent to a low of 37 percent, achieving a mean of 58 percent accuracy. Students from the intensive program, then, scored a 32 percent higher mean than those from the traditional four-semester sequence. The Princeton examination showed similar results. Students from the intensive program achieved here a mean twenty-five percent higher. Their concentration on German everyday for fifteen weeks accounted for their superior performance in each of the skills tested. The students were not a select group.

A result of the intensive semester equally as important as these high test scores is the large percentage of students the program produces who continue their studies in German. Of the fourteen students who completed the first intensive program--the large majority of whom enrolled not out of love for languages, but primarily in order to put their foreign language experience behind them in the shortest possible time, and hopefully, with the least effort--of these students, seventy percent have elected or will elect advanced German courses. This compares with about twenty percent from the traditional four-semester sequence. Of the thirteen students enrolled in the present program about eighty percent plan to elect third year German courses, and three of this number intend to become German majors.

The intensive program demands hard and constant work. Still, having gained much in terms of satisfaction and knowledge, many students want to come back for more.

As might be expected, the greatest single demand the intensive program makes on students and instructor is that of time. Before electing the program, students must be aware of their obligations to it. Unless they are willing and able to spend, daily, the necessary number of hours in the classroom, in the laboratory, and in preparation, they should not register for the program. And once registered, they should elect no additional courses, other than perhaps physical education.

The demand made on the instructor throughout the semester amounts to at least thirty hours per week of teaching, laboratory supervision, and examination marking. Invaluable is an assistant who can correct quizzes and conduct special afternoon drill sessions for students having difficulty with any phase of the daily work. It is a special challenge to the instructor to avoid such tedium in the program as could result from students' overexposure to repetitive materials and procedures. One way to meet this challenge is to vary the reading and listening material from serious to humorous, political to cultural, and to alternate difficult reading selections with relatively easy ones. Encouragement for the instructor lies in the remarkable progress of the students and in the esprit de corps that develops in the group.

The German faculty at UTA has approved the intensive program as a permanent part of the curriculum. It based its decision not only on the encouraging results of examinations and on the high percentage of students continuing in German, but also on student approval and interest. Those in the intensive program have been unanimous in their satisfaction with it. Despite the hard work it involves, several participants have said they would like to do the same again in another language, or even in another field of

study. Others have encouraged their friends to enroll in the intensive program next semester. And some students who had already studied another foreign language for as many as six semesters in a traditional program of three or four hours per week maintain that they feel far more secure with and have a far better ability to understand, speak, and write German.

The intensive program, we believe, is not only the most effective but also the most attractive method of studying German in the American classroom. Maximum exposure in the shortest possible time can provide the answer for undergraduates who question the validity of a four semester foreign language requirement that fails to give them a functional control of the language.

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